**Session 4 and 5: Practice of Effective Literacy Instruction in the Classroom** **Read the following questions, and post your responses to the discussion board.**

1. Discuss three effective elements in literacy practice.

*One effective element in literary practice is explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. This instruction must take place in the form of modeling followed by guided instruction and then independent practice. Teachers cannot assume students have the necessary comprehension strategies to tackle increasingly difficult text, particularly nonfiction. Strategies good readers employ before, during, and after reading must be taught. A second effective element in literary practice is quality vocabulary instruction including phonics, prefixes and suffixes, base words, roots, proper word usage, parts of speech, and context clues. A final element in effective literary practice is incorporating writing skills daily and routinely asking students to create written responses related to their reading and to share those responses with their peers.*

2. Discuss research based perspectives on catering to the diversity and needs of ESLstudents and struggling readers.

*The needs of ESL students and struggling readers are best met through differentiation as well as a combination of whole group and small group instruction. Formative as well as standardized assessments should be utilized to determine the specific areas of need for these students. The results of these assessments determine what modifications and supports the students will need in order to be successful within the large group and what the targeted areas of focus for small group instruction should be.*

3. Discuss balanced literacy instruction focusing on independent learning.

*Balanced literacy provides students with a variety of daily reading and writing activities that encompass phonics, grammar, reading skills, comprehension strategies, and writing. In these classrooms, there is a true balance between reading and writing. Students participate in guided reading and writing, shared reading and writing, and independent reading and writing. A balanced literacy teacher offers purposeful instruction based on the specific needs and progress of their students. Needs and progress must be continually assessed in order to adjust instruction accordingly.*

4. Identify the environment that is needed for optimum literacy learning.

*The ideal environment for literacy learning is built upon authentic literature and fosters a love of reading and writing. In this environment, teachers have the freedom to choose materials they know will motivate and excite their students. The classroom is a true learning community in which the students are learning with and from each other. Students are encouraged to build upon the skills they currently possess and are given the necessary time and support to do so. In such an environment, the teacher is able to plan based upon his or her assessment of the students’ needs, not based upon the lessons dictated by a core reading program.*

5. Discuss balanced literacy instruction and tailoring instructional strategies to the specific needs of each student.

*Classrooms today are filled with a diverse group of students, each with their own strengths, needs, interests, and motivations. The challenge for the balanced literacy instructor is meeting the needs of all of those students as well as fulfilling the requirements dictated by an increasingly challenging curriculum based on Common Core standards. More than ever, today’s teacher needs to be aware of the progress their students have made so they can plan for future instruction accordingly. Struggling readers must be given the increased support and instruction they require. In addition, students who are excelling must be given what they need so they can progress as well. All of this requires a teacher who makes use of whole group and small group instruction and who incorporates a variety of activities and instructional methods.*

1. Discuss the phonics versus whole language debate.

*When I was completing my graduate work for my masters and reading specialist certification the focus was completely on whole language. It was all about the use of authentic literature and the incorporation of authentic reading and writing activities. Much of my reading instruction over the years was based on this model. A few years ago, my district began heavily focusing on the phonics approach. Dibels became an integral part of the lives of our primary students and teachers. After several years, it became a daily part of my everyday life as well. I teach sixth grade students. The concept of focusing on phonics over comprehension went against everything I believed. During my assessment of a multitude of students, I began to observe many who had excellent fluency but had little to no comprehension of the text they had read so beautifully. Clearly, phonics only was not the answer. Since then, my district has slowly evolved to a more balanced approach as is outlined in this article. In addition, there is an emphasis on assessment, observation, and understanding the needs of individual students, and adjusting instruction accordingly which is what the author of this article suggests. Simply taking the best of whole language and combining it with the best of phonics will not yield the results we need. We need to provide what he calls “deliberate instruction” that is research-based and designed around individual learning needs.*  
2. Discuss the balanced instruction? Discuss the importance of writing to a variety of texts.

*An integral part of balanced instruction is the utilization of a variety of texts as a way of developing students’ ability to both read and respond, verbally and in writing, to what they have read. I have two children, one in high school and the other a freshman is college. My son attends a small liberal arts college. He is required to read and write for every class that he takes. The variety of texts he is presented with is quite vast and the written responses required are extremely challenging. The professors expect that he not just read the text but make a meaningful connection with that text and create a thoughtful response that he is able to defend if called upon. These are the kind of higher-level thinking skills we must foster in our students. They need to be able to read, understand, think critically, and respond to a variety of texts. They need to be able to develop a coherent and focused response that goes beyond an explicit summary. Finally, they need to be able to verbalize their thoughts and engage in discussion and debate related to them. Balanced literacy instruction is the way for us to achieve these goals.*

3. What is your opinion regarding science to the rescue?

*I agree with the points the author makes in Science to the Rescue. I agree that we need to be incorporating methods that are supported by research. I also agree that continual assessment and observation of students is necessary and that plans must be deliberately changed based upon the results of those assessments. My fear is that too many teachers are not being given the time, the tools, or the training necessary to make these things happen.*